

Alternate Menu Planning Approaches

Alternate menu planning systems may be implemented by individual School Food Authorities (SFA) that develop their own innovative approaches. These menu planning systems are subject to guidelines established by United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) regulations. These guidelines are explained more fully in this section and are designed to protect the nutritional and fiscal integrity of child nutrition programs.

Definition

Alternate menu planning approaches are those adopted or developed by school food authorities that differ from the standard approaches established in regulations (Traditional Food Based, Enhanced Food Based, Nutrient Standard Menu Planning, and Assisted Nutrient Standard Menu Planning). There are two types of alternate approaches:

- Pre-approved specific modifications to food based menu planning options, or
- Major changes to standard menu planning options or completely new approaches developed by SFAs.

Pre-approved Specific Modifications

There are three modifications available to SFAs using one of the food based menu planning options for lunches. The State Office does not require prior approval for the SFA to use one or more of these modifications in their menu planning.

1. Modification to the meat/meat alternate component

The required minimum quantities of the meat/meat alternate component in the food-based menu planning approaches may be offered as a weekly total with a one ounce (or its equivalent for certain

meat alternates such as yogurt, peanut butter, etc.) minimum daily serving size. This modification does not apply if the minimum serving of meat/meat alternate is less than one ounce.

Section 12E Table 1
Modification to the Meat/Meat Alternate Component, Sample Elementary Menu, Traditional Group IV

Day	Entree Choices Offered	Total ounces M/MA
Monday	Peanut Butter Sandwich (2 T. peanut butter=1 oz. M/MA)	1 oz.
	Baked Chicken	2 oz.
	Macaroni and Cheese (2 oz. cheese)	2 oz.
Tuesday	Cheese (½ oz.) Burger (2 oz.) on Bun	2½ oz.
	Chef Salad with Low Fat Cheese (1 oz.) and Turkey Strips (1 oz.)	2 oz.
	Vegetarian Chili Bowl (½ cup beans)	2 oz.
	Peanut Butter Sandwich (2 T. peanut butter=1 oz. M/MA)	1 oz.
	Chicken Strip Salad (1 oz. chicken, 1 oz. low fat cheddar)	2 oz.
	Fruited Yogurt (½ cup)	1 oz.
Thursday	Cheesy (1 oz.) Bean (¼ cup) Burrito w/ Salsa	2 oz.
	Vegetable Beef Soup (1 oz. beef, ¼ cup kidney beans)	2 oz.
	Hot Dog on Bun	2 oz.
Friday	Sub Sandwich with Turkey (1½ oz.) and Lowfat American Cheese (½ oz.)	2 oz.
	Fruit Salad Plate with Cottage Cheese (¼ cup)	1 oz.
	Chicken Nuggets with BBQ Dipping Sauce	2 oz.
Week's Total Meat/Meat Alternate Offered (counting largest item each day):		10½ oz.
Week's Total Meat/Meat Alternate Required: 5 serving days X 2 oz. M/MA minimum required = 10 oz. Required Total for the Week		

Under this modification, if the SFA is offering a choice of several meat/meat alternate entrees on their menu, the largest meat/meat alternate item would count toward the weekly total required. Individual meat/meat alternates offered must meet the minimum serving size of one ounce. See Table 1 Section 12E for an illustration of this rule when using the traditional menu planning option, Group IV.

2. Modification to age/grade groups under the traditional food based menu planning approach

Either or both of the following modifications may be used by SFAs using the traditional food based menu planning approach and choosing to analyze their menus for nutrient content.

- a. For lunches served to students in grades K-6, the SFA may choose to use the portion sizes indicated in the meal pattern for Group IV, but meet the target nutrient levels for children in grades K-6 rather than grades 4-12 as shown in the meal pattern chart.
- b. For lunches served to students in grades 7-12, the SFA may choose to use the portion sizes indicated in the meal pattern for Group IV, but meet the target nutrient levels for children in grades 7-12 rather than grades 4-12 as shown in the meal pattern chart.

3. Modification for the majority of children

This modification allows for SFAs on the enhanced food based or the traditional food based menu planning approach to plan menus using quantities and nutrient levels for the majority of children being served if only one age or grade in the group of children is outside the established levels in the meal pattern chart.

Major Changes or Alternate Approaches

SFAs may modify one of the established menu planning approaches (Traditional Food Based, Enhanced Food Based, Nutrient Standard Menu Planning, and Assisted Nutrient Standard Menu Planning) or may develop their own menu planning approach. The alternate menu planning approach must contain the elements outlined in the following section and must be available in writing for review and monitoring purposes. The written material must address how the required elements are met by the alternate approach.

Elements for Major Changes or Alternate Approaches

1. Offer fluid milk
 - Under all menu planning approaches for lunches, schools must offer fluid milk.
 - The types of milk offered must be consistent with the types of milk consumed in the previous year. However, if a particular type of milk constituted less than one percent of the total amount of milk consumed in the previous year, a school does not need to offer this type of milk.
2. Include offer versus serve for senior high students and follow standard offer versus serve guidelines for all students. If these requirements are not followed, the plan must indicate:
 - the affected age/grade groups,
 - the number and type of items (and, if applicable, the quantities for the items) that constitute a reimbursable lunch under offer versus serve,
 - how such procedures will reduce plate waste, and
 - how a reasonable level of calories and nutrients for the lunch as taken is provided.

3. Meet the Recommended Dietary Allowances and lunchtime energy allowances (nutrient levels) and indicate the age/grade groups served and how the nutrient levels are met for those age/grade groups
4. Follow the requirements for competitive foods
5. Follow the requirements for counting food items and products towards the meal patterns if the alternate approach is a food based menu planning approach
6. Identify a reimbursable lunch at the point of service
7. Explain how the alternate menu planning approach can be monitored, including a description of the records that will be maintained to document compliance with the program's administrative and nutrition requirements
8. Follow the requirements for weighted analysis and for approved software for nutrient standard menu planning approaches (through September 30, 2003, schools are not required to conduct a weighted analysis).

Approval

Any SFA-developed menu planning approach must be submitted in writing for review to the Office of School Food Services and Nutrition. The written plan must contain all of the elements required. The menu planning approach must be approved by the Office of School Food Services and Nutrition and by the Southeast Regional Office in Atlanta before implementation.

Notes: